DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 373 CS 013 002

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TITLE	Rethinking Literacy Studies: From the Past to the Present.
PUB DATE	1996-03-00
NOTE	12p.; Paper presented at the World Conference on Literacy (Philadelphia, PA, March 12-15, 1996). For other papers from this conference, see CE 075 168, 171, 173, 180, 183 and CS 012 996, CS 013 000.
AVAILABLE FROM	Thirty-three selected papers from this conference are available on the "Literacy Online" Web site: http://www.literacyonline.org
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Concept Formation; Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Language Usage; *Literacy; Metaphors; Models; *Student Needs

ABSTRACT

Reviewing the research literature in literacy studies demands patience to deconstruct the multilayered meanings of the concept of literacy. Literacy is a loaded term that is also embedded in myths associated with social and economic progress, political democracy, social and educational mobility, and the development of cognitive skills. Graff (1995) reminds readers that literacy has historically represented and continues to represent different things to people. Scribner (1988) "unpackages literacy" by using the metaphors of "adaptation," "power," and "state of grace"--if students' literacy skills are at level they are in the adaptive mode, below level and they have fallen from grace, and above level they attain power or status. Viewed as an abstract set of decontextualized skills, literacy contributes to the creation of the "deficit" model in educational and social systems. This model has been applied in many remedial reading and writing programs at all educational levels. Ironically, attempts to teach literacy skills in the schools often restricts literacy development because of educators' lack of knowledge and awareness of the interweaving of social, cultural, and oral literacy contexts of language use and identity. Students' language use in other contexts dramatically conflicts with school discourse and many students fail to acquire higher literacy skills. "Multiliteracies" must be studied in many contexts to better understand their role in instruction and curriculum development. There is a pressing need to define and recognize "non-schooled" literacies associated with different mediums and tools, including the technological, visual, and mathematical, and literacies associated with using information technology. (Contains 58 references.) (NKA)

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RETHINKING LITERACY STUDIES: FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

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| Introduction | Literacy Theories and Methodologies | The Oral and Literate Traditions | The Great Divide and Redefining Literacy | Sociolinguistics and Literacy/Speech Events | Conclusion | References |

INTRODUCTION

It is critical for administrators and teachers involved in adult literacy programs to be aware of the rich body of research in the area of literacy studies. Reviewing the research literature in literacy studies demands infinite patience to deconstruct the multilayered meanings of the concept of literacy as well as a critical temperament to determine what is significant from what is not. Clearly, literacy is a loaded term that is also embedded in myths associated with social and economic progress, political democracy, social and educational mobility, and the development of cognitive skills (Graff, 1981, 1987, 1988, 1995). Graff (1995) reminds readers that the concept of literacy has historically represented and continues to represent different things to people. This ambiguity has contributed to what has become known as "the literacy myth." To demythologize the concept, it is necessary to execute what Scribner and Cole (1988) call a process of "unpackaging literacy" and which Scribner (1988) does by using the metaphors of "adaptation," "power" and "state of grace" to refer to literacy.

Examining the historical legacy of literacy (Graff, 1987) is enough to caution anyone with the slightest bit of hubris not to speak too knowingly or confidently about what literacy is. However, in the everyday world, literacy is generally associated with an abstract set of reading and writing skills or abilities that exist independently of any context. An individual possesses literacy internally, not unlike a character or personality trait; thus, it resembles a cognitive toolbox. In the world of government and education, literacy is often viewed simply as a process of decoding or encoding texts and an individual's performance is evaluated against a normative standard and criteria. Applying Scribner's metaphors to this situation translates into the following categories: If students' literacy skills are at level they are in the adaptive mode; below level and they have fallen from grace; and when they are above level they attain power or status, the rewards for speaking the dominant discourse.

Nevertheless, the concept of literacy always seems elusive because of its conceptual complexity and because in

ED 413 003

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investigating it one often creates a house of mirrors by using language to explain its use. This may explain why some of the research appears to be empirically driven and seemingly obsessed with operationalizing this concept with specific criteria and data. Only through this process can one know literacy; otherwise, how could governments and world organizations fund massive literacy campaigns based on something so intangible. Teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers all want higher levels of literacy and this higher anxiety level feeds the political, social and economic myths associated with the concept and further masks its reality, preventing many from recognizing the literacy's historical, political, cultural, social, and ideological complexities and implications of literacy.

Graff (1981, 1988, 1995), Goody and Watt (1988), Oxenham (1980) and others have described how difficult it is for researchers to identify and separate the effects or consequences of literacy from the historical, social and political contexts from which it arose. This is especially true in the case where certain cognitive attributions or skills are attributed to the acquisition of literacy. As a result, many critical questions pervade the literature: Did literacy contribute to the rise of civilization and to social progress or was it the result or effect of dramatic social and political changes in a society or culture? (Oxenham, 1980) What social purposes or events gave rise to literacy? And what are the effects of literacy, if any, on an individual's development and cognition and are the effects attributable to the contexts of the learning environment or are they the product of new ways of thinking in using reading and writing? Finally, is it possible to truly know what people are doing when they engage in literate acts or practices?

Because of questions like the above, literacy retains a mysterious atmosphere in some cultures that may derive historically from its links to the magic use of mnemonic devices, images, religious emblems, etc. (see Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*). Anthropologists have described how missionaries by teaching literacy in bible studies contributed to the creation of "cargo cults" among native peoples in Melanasia (Street, 1995). The natives came to associate the written word with the dispensation of power and material goods and, of course, their perception was correct. Literacy is also seen as an equalizer; however, its absence can relegate a nation to economic and cultural backwardness or an individual to a fallen moral state (Graff, 1979; Erickson, 1988). However, higher levels of literacy can serve as a symbolic form of cultural capital, according to critical theorists, like Giroux and Apple, and others influenced by the social theories of Pierre Bourdieu. His theory takes the position that the dominant discourse and ideology of capitalist society are reproduced and rewarded in educational institutions (Collins, 1991; Nespor, 1991).

Viewed as an abstract set of decontextualized skills, literacy contributes to the creation of the "deficit" model in educational and social systems. Individuals and societies are labeled as inadequate because they do not contain enough of the valued product. Such a model has been applied in many remedial reading and writing programs at all educational levels, perpetuating further iniquity to those already once victimized by the ascribed status of race, class, and caste, and relegated to inadequate schools. Ironically, attempts to teach literacy skills in the schools to alter this status through achievement, often restricts literacy development because of teachers' and administrators' lack of knowledge and awareness of the interweaving of social, cultural and oral contexts of language use and identity (Gumperz, 1986; Collins & Michaels, 1986; Michaels, 1986; Michaels; 1991; Ogbu, 1988). Students from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds find themselves judged and evaluated against a standard normative discourse, what Cook-Gumperz (1986) calls "schooled literacy." Students' language use in other contexts dramatically conflicts with school discourse and many students' fail to acquire higher literacy skills. Therefore, it continues to be the case that people's lives and futures, for better or worse, are determined daily by an evaluative process conducted by a seemingly value-neutral and objective school system rooted in a positivistic model that rationalizes social and economic iniquity as well as class and racial stratification as an inevitable and objective outcome of the sorting process of the educational system.

LITERACY THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

This review of some of the major research in the field of literacy studies will "unpack" some of the meanings of literacy in order to reveal its multi-dimensionality and its embeddedness in social, cultural and political contexts. The review looks at major work in sociolinguistics, ethnography, and anthropology in an attempt to point to the broader implications for literacy studies. Understanding the nature of literacy and its apparent consequences necessitates examining how it is practiced or used in many situations and contexts and to unmask it. The work of Heath (1983, 1987, 1988), Street (1984, 1987, 1995) and others have demonstrated the importance for students, teachers, and

researchers to engage the "literate events and practices" and "actions" of their own and other communities as ethnographers. This research contributes to an understanding of the nature of "multiple literacies" that exist in the intersection of the contexts of language, culture, society, politics and ideology contexts and developing ways to include them in curriculum and instruction. The work of Graff (1995), Heath (1982, 1983, 1988), Street (1984, 1995), Langer (1987, 1992) and others point to a "plurality of literacies" or what Street (1995) call "social literacies," those literacy practices that people engage in at home, community, profession, e.g. academic literacy (see Geisler, 1992, 1994; Bazerman 1992). This represents the basis for what Street (1995) calls the New Literacy Studies, an approach that combines the anthropological model with a sociolinguistic framework.

In reviewing the significance of Graff's work, Street (1984) states that different forms and practices of literacy are laden with an ideology that promotes "the construction and dissemination of conceptions as to what literacy is in relation to the interests of different classes and groups" (p. 105). Street argues for what he calls an "ideological model" of literacy to counter the more traditional "autonomous model" associated with the early research of Goody and Watt, Havelock, Olson and Ong. According to Street (1995), the work of these scholars contributed to the notion of literacy "as an independent variable, supposedly detached from its social context" (p. 76). Street (1984) uses the term "literacy practices" rather than events (e.g. Heath); practices are the beliefs that people have about reading and writing when they are involved in these activities. For Street (1984, 1995) reading and writing are not only embedded in cultural and social contexts and but also in power and authority relationships. By arguing that no literacy theory is objective or neutral, Street hopes that by being overt about the "ideological model," to push literacy studies in new directions. Also, Street (1995) states that the concept of "multiple literacies" is critical "in challenging the autonomous model" (p.134). To identify and recognize multiple literacies in the educational system would further democratize the educational process and contribute to greater equality and opportunity. Ultimately, it might lead to the creation of a teaching/learning model built on the "practices" of multiple and social literacies that are currently marginalized.

Examining literacy practices would involve an anthropological or symbolic interactional model to get what Geertz would call a "thick description" of what individuals are doing while engaged in different literacy practices. This would avoid the "if I were a horse" approach that Street (1995) associates with the 19th century anthropological paradigm of Sir James Frazier and the ethnocentrism that he believes still informs academic work on literacy, including the work of the creators of the autonomous model. Ethnographic research is one methodolgy to use but as Heath and Athanases (1995 mention in a recent article, the practice of ethnography in educational research must return to the rigorous criteria of the anthropological model if it is to remain viable for doing educational research. Writing literacy autobiographies is one way to narrativize one's literacy's experiences and take ownership. Other approaches would be required to reclaim more localized literacies and their coterminous epistemologies. Defining multiple literacies, spoken, written, or otherwise would broaden the research agenda, and stimulate cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives.

In addition, literary and critical theory have much to offer from this writer's perspective, especially in shedding more light on concepts such as "literacy events," especially by examining how interpretive acts, oral and written, (Heath, 1988 refers to them as "interpretive competencies") are performed in various linguistic and social contexts. For example, Wolfgang Iser in the *Act of Reading* outlines a framework that readers use for anticipating literary meaning in texts by using textual cues and presuppositions to fill in gaps and to predict meaning. By broadening the definition of what a "text" is, one can begin to examine the nature of intertextuality and how "interpretive competencies" (Heath, 1988) are used in different mediums, e.g. visual, aural, numerical, technological, etc., and assess how they are used critically. This kind of cross-medium, cross-genre approach may prove valuable. For example, Dell Hymes (1974) considered Kenneth Burke's concept of "language as symbolic action" a fruitful starting place for what he called a form of "linguistic ethnography" an "ethnography of symbolic forms (myth, ritual, song, chant, dance, and the like, and the subtler forms of daily life), and the analysis of the patterns of language use..." (p. 140). Approaching literacy from a symbolic or literary theory can add new critical perspectives about how literary genres and subgenres may function, for example, in cross-cultural and social contexts. It also may provide some critical distance from the more historical and epistemological problems that have plagued literacy studies.

THE ORAL AND LITERATE TRADITIONS

One specter that has haunted the domain of literacy studies is centered in the classic separation of the oral and written traditions of discourse and the apparent division between preliterate and literate cultures. As much as current research has demonstrated the inextricable linkage and mixing of oral and written features in the production of language practices (Heath 1982; Tannen 1982; Hymes 1974; Gumperz, 1986; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Bernstein, 1972) there is still a tendency to consider literacy as an abstraction associated with decontextualized reading and writing skills, and as an isolated cognitive entity. Goody and Watt (1988), Ong (1977, 1982) and Olson (1977), the intellectual power behind the "autonomous model," according to Brian Street, have contended that in the oral tradition meaning was context-specific, embedded in concrete events, and it was embedded in shared meanings and the use of formulaic phrases and clauses to enhance memory and recall. According to Ong (1982), in oral cultures the spoken word shapes sound as well as thought processes and the present moment takes precedence over the past. In addition, communication in an oral culture is face-to-face and meaning is contextualized by gestures and paralinguistic features like intonation, prosody, etc. On the other hand, writing and reading are solitary acts that foster the interiorization of meaning and the interior development of thought (Ong, 1982). With the advent of writing, the oral transmission of myths gave way to recording historical events in writing (Goody and Watt, 1988). With the objectification of thought in written language and the development of analytical thought, a skeptical approach to truth and knowledge was created (Ong, 1977, 1982). Goody and Watt (1988) attribute the presence of writing to the "division of knowledge into autonomous cognitive disciplines" (p.18). With writing, context becomes unimportant; words accrue layers of meaning as a result of being used in different contexts and come to us with others intentions and meanings (Bakhtin 1981). With writing comes the development of logic, rationality, linearity, abstract thinking, and the ability to classify (Goody and Watt, 1988, Ong, 1982). In a recent essay, David Olson (1993) states that "there seems little doubt that writing and reading played a critical role in producing the shift from thinking about things to thinking about representations of those things" (P.177). Meaning becomes contained and locked in the text, and the purpose of reading is to unlock the meaning.

The objectification of knowledge, logic and truth in written discourse evolved into formulaic models of writing such as the five paragraph essay that Heath (1987) refers to as "a genre specific only to the classroom" (102). To unpack the myth, Heath (1987) notes the relationship between narrative, literary form, and essay production, and calls upon teachers of writing to have students research the internal construction of the essay form to know it from within the structure. In this way they will come see how it is the various components are integrated; this will help students and teachers be able to get "inside a literate essay" (89), and make the all-too-familiar strange. The essay form is one artifact of the literacy tradition which continues to serve as the dominant genre of written discourse in school settings. Other kinds of writing forms include the specialized discourses of the academic disciplines, what some would refer to as academic literacies, with specific epistemologies or "ways of knowing" (Langer 1992, MLA). As writing becomes more concentrated in specialized literacies, literacy tends to become more divisive and alienating, working against the grain of its liberatory power and contributing to the separation of individuals from each other and to greater social, economic and class stratification (Oxenham, 1980). For example, some educators believe that the lack of access to information technology is creating a growing gap between the "haves," those with access to the technology and the "have nots" those who are educationally marginalized or technologically illiterate. Literacy has always been associated with individual advancement and creativity (Oxenham, 1980) and those who are technologically knowledgeable are those who are now creating new genres and forms of literacy.

THE GREAT DIVIDE AND REDEFINING LITERACY

The split between the oral and written traditions and the assumptions surrounding the consequences of literacy contributed to the creation of what Scribner and Cole (1981) referred to as the "great divide" theory. The "great-divide" theory postulates that literacy contributes to "higher-order" thinking and cognitive skills which automatically separate preliterate cultures and societies from literate ones. Scribner and Cole's research with the Vai people of Liberia put this theory to the test and raised the possibility that any cognitive differences associated with oral or written language may very well be the result of the conditions under which one learned to be literate. The conditions for examining the various literacies were ideal because the practices (writing Vai script, speaking Arabic, and speaking and writing English) were separate from each other and from the concept of "schooled literacy," except for those who studied English. Scribner's and Cole's study began by trying to tease out the intricate and complex relationships between cognition and written language to determine what if any were the supposed cognitive effects of literacy acquisition. The results of the research

pointed to a connection between the particular uses of literacies or practices and the manifestations of specific kinds of skills, and questioned the assumption that literacy automatically contributed to cognitive development across content domains and learning contexts. The specific results of the research indicated that those who read and wrote Vai script demonstrated better communication skills than Arabic speakers and non-literates and those who were literate in Arabic and learned the Qur'an by memory performed well when it came to remembering a series of numbers with an accrual of one number, but not as well when it came to retelling a story. When it came to reciting back a sentence and responding to a comprehension format, Vai literates outperformed Arabic literates and non-literates, again providing evidence "that indicates that social organization creates the conditions for a variety of literacy activities, and that different types of texts reflect different social practices."(1988, p.69). The evidence supported the belief that non-schooled literacies contributed to cognitive improvement. The research has questions many educators unexamined beliefs that literacy, cognitive development and schooling are inseparable and it opens the pandora's box for identifying and assessing multiple literacy practices in other non-school contexts. As Scribner and Cole (1988) state: "The assumption that logicality is in the text and the text is in school can lead to a serious underestimation of the cognitive skills involved in non-school, non-essay writing, and reciprocally, to an overestimation of the intellectual skills that the essayist test 'necessarily' entails". (61).

Scribner and Cole's (1981) definition of literacy is the product of an anthropological model for understanding and interpreting literacy: "Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use"(p. 236) and according to them "inquiries into the cognitive consequences of literacy are inquiries into the impact of socially organized practices in other domains"(p. 237). Basing his definition of literacy on Krashen's distinction between "acquisition" versus "learning," James Gee (1991) has defined literacy as the ability to control the use of secondary discourses (e.g. school, work, profession, etc.) rather than simply using the primary ones of home and community; thus, Gee adds a metacognitive or metalanguage dimension to the definition of literacy. The use of metalanguage for teachers and students is also called for in a recent journal article by The New London Group (1996): they (students and teachers) need a metalanguage-a language for talking about language, images, texts, and meaning-making interactions (77). Judith Langer (1987) defines literacy from "a sociocognitive perspective that incorporates social practices, conceptions of reading and writing, and literacy as a way of thinking into the definition of literacy" (p.2). Langer sees literacy as "an activity, a way of thinking not a set of skills" and "a purposeful activity" related to the use of reading and writing in many contexts (4). According to Langer, literacy is a "culturally specific phenomenon" (7) and cannot be separated from the social contexts and purposes in which it is practiced. All of these definitions have added new dimensions, insights and directions for redefining literacy, especially in seeing as a thinking activity. Examining specific social and cultural contexts of literacy may point to new research questions concerning how to conceptualize here-to-fore unrecognized social or multiple literacies and the contexts of their practices.

SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND LITERACY/SPEECH EVENTS

Other theoretical approaches in literacy studies have evolved from the field of sociolinguistics and anthropology e.g. the use of ethnography, and continue to deepen our understanding of literacy. Heath's (1988) definition of a "literacy event" reverberates with the insights of sociolinguistics as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants interactions and their interpretive processes" (p.350) Heath and other researchers have been influenced by the work of Bernstein (1972) (Hymes, 1972, 1974) and Gumperz and others. Research in the area ethnography of communication provides a theoretical framework for much of the current literature (Ogbu, 1988; Michaels 1986, 1993; Collins and Michaels, 1986: Cook-Gumperz: 1986; Tannen; 1982, 1986). Hymes and Bernstein's work sheds light on the nature of speech communities and how members use oral and written language in different contexts and roles. Hymes (1972) states that a speech community has rules "for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety" (p. 54). Hymes notes that speech events are "governed by rules and norms" and that a speech act "implicates both linguistic and social norms" (p.57) Each speech act has distinctive parlinguistic features associated with the speech event and the community. Bernstein's work in sociolinguistics involves understanding the relationship between speech production and social class and still has relevance in understanding working class linguistic practices and attitudes. It may also provide insights into the current relationships among working-class identity, social literacies, language and resistance to the culture of school. A model for this work may be Willis's study of British working class youths in *Learning to Labour* and how they defined themselves through

resistance to school. Ogbu's (1988) research on the identity construction and "castelike" perceptions of African-American students who resist school because they see it as representative of "white" culture is also relevant to looking at self and language identifications.

Working class dialect would be representative of what Bernstein's (1972) called a "restricted code," a dialect that is heavily contextualized and based on "shared identifications," "expectations" and "common assumptions." (476). According to Bernstein the restricted code is positional or status oriented and the emphasis is on "we" rather than the "I" associated with the "elaborated code." The elaborated code is person-oriented, based on an open rather than a closed communication system, as well as a speakers' ability to make language and intention explicit. It occurs in situations "wherever the intent of the other person cannot be taken for granted... then speakers are forced to elaborate their meanings and make them both explicit and specific"(p. 476). The elaborated code "encourages the speaker to focus upon the experience of others as different" (p. 477). According to Bernstein, the restricted code works against the idea of self-development "as an area of enquiry," unlike the elaborated code which contains "possibilities which inhere in a complex conceptual hierarchy for the organization and expression of inner experience" (p.480). Those who speak an elaborated code or middle class English use a language that is reproduced and rewarded in school contexts as Bourdieu and other social theorists would argue. Use of the elaborated code gives a student cultural or "symbolic capital" that can translate into power and goods. However, the restricted code militates against the exploration of inner experience and can lead to poor performance in schools. The use of language to explore the inner self is not valued in many working class environments. As Bernstein indicates the restricted codes are rich in meanings or what Street may refer to as "social literacies" or the New London group (1996) would call "multiliteracies."

In the field of sociolinguistics, Gumperz's (1982) concept of "conversational inference" has provided insights for understanding the nature of speech acts. According to Gumperz, language is interpreted in a context in which participants "assess others" intentions, and on which they base their responses" (153). These are shared conventions for oral interaction that Gumperz calls "contextualization conventions" and that include cues like prosody, dialect, style, lexical and syntactic options (p. 131). This perspective may continue to inform how expressive discourse as well as autobiographical writing makes connections between the conventions and features of spoken and written narratives and other kinds of discourse.

Historically, working class culture has had a literary tradition that has stimulated social and political criticism as well as literary criticisms. Both Street (1995), Robinson (1988) point out the significance of the work of the literary and social critic, Raymond Williams, in defining what Street calls "the literary/critical tradition." (p. 59) Street states that Williams clearly defined terms such as class, culture, art, ideology, etc. and that Williams and Hoggart (*The Uses of Literacy*) is important for anthropologists to understand the critical literary traditions of people in order to understand "indigenous cultures" (p.59). Jay Robinson (1988) mentions that Williams revealed the historical fact that literature and literacy were once synonymous and that literature applied to a variety of genres and not only to high or literature during the rise of industrialism in Britain. According to Street, Williams critically analyzed the relationship among class, society, culture, democracy and the mixing of both high and popular culture forms as they are experienced by the whole society. (p.59). Such an ethnographic approach could uncover the critical tradition and what Heath (1988) calls "interpretive competencies" in the interaction of roles and language production in working class and other marginalized cultures. Such studies may prove valuable now since working class society and culture are under siege economically and socially. Working class cultures increasingly exist in isolated enclaves and by studying language production in literary forms and genres such as folklore, the war story, the life/sports analogies, etc. educators and researchers may reinvigorate communities and schools that many social scientists believe are dying as our society moves from an industrial to a post-industrial society. In addition, applied to analyzing the linguistic code of working class and other cultural societies, Bernstein's concepts of "restricted and elaborated codes" may provide new insights for reviving educational systems in these communities. And following the spirit of Williams, the genres of current popular culture are rich areas to explore the changing nature of written and oral language in different cultural and social contexts. "Literacies" surround us and exist in both high and low culture and meanings are contextualized in a multitude of mediums and situations. They are defined by The New London Group (1996) as the modes of "linguistic meaning, visual meaning, audio meaning, gestural meaning, spatial meaning and the multimodal patterns of meaning that relate the first five modes of meaning to each other" (p. 65). By bringing a critical dimension to "multiliteracies" or what the London Group calls "critical framing," students will develop a metalangauge for understanding how meanings are created. Critical framing involves "interpreting the social and cultural context of particular Designs of meaning" and postulates an ability to develop a critical perspective on the context (p. 88).

Heath's (1983) ethnographic study of the communities of Raodville and Trackton, one white and the other African-American, in the Peidmonts of the Carolinas examined how members of these working class communities used language at home and in their communities and how their children experienced school. Heath (1988) used the terminology of "literacy event" as one that has "certain interactional rules and demands particular interpretive competencies on the part of the participants" (p. 350). Literacy events involve the interaction of oral and written modes of discourse. Heath's study showed that the language use of members of Trackton and Roadville did not translate into positive experiences for the children's' performances in the school environment. The cultural differences and boundaries between these two communities and the school culture were significant. On the other hand, the townspeople used linguistic practices that prepared their children for success at school. For example, In Trackton the oral and written modes interacted and children use language in multiple ways, while Roadville children were restricted in language use and were. On the other hand, the townspeople used their imagination and encouraged their children to do so in activities like storytelling. Trackton residents engaged in acts of interpretation and shared discussions about and around the meaning of a written text, e.g. newspaper. Heath (1988) is clear in pointing out that Traction residents did not lack literacy skills "but knowledge about oral language uses which would enable them to obtain information about the content and uses of written documents, and to ask questions to clarify their meanings"(p. 365). In Trackton, children shared in these discussions with family members and others, while in Roadville children had very defined social roles and are taught to follow "scripts" defined for them by adults; any form of creative use of language was frowned upon (p. 346). Interestingly enough, Heath noted that when Roadville children entered school there was a fit between their home life and the school especially around boundaries and limitations, but eventually they did not fare well. Because of their restrictive roles and Heath's observations illustrate that schools are not constructed to reinforce and reward the kinds of literate practices and events that children learn in their homes in Trackton and Roadville. Instead, middle class language is rewarded and other linguistic practices are considered substandard. Street (1995) mentions that Heath failed to research in detail the concept of middle class literacy and that his own research project in an upper-middle class community is involved in examine the differences between the "literacy practices" of such a community and "schooled" literacy (pp. 112-113).

The relationship between narrative construction, storytelling, and written narrative continues to be explored by researchers using sociolinguistic model and approaches. Tannen (1987) examined the relationship between oral conversation and literary discourse in order to illustrate their commonalities. Analyzing the mixing of oral and written narrative genres and different literary forms are areas for further exploration especially to improve the instructional approaches for teaching writing to non-native speakers of English. Knowing more about cross-cultural and social contexts and the implications of spoken/oral conversation for teaching writing is extremely important for teachers at all levels. Heath's work is extremely valuable and serves as an ethnographic model for studying language use across home, community, culture and institutional contexts in order to discover ways to include different "literacy events" in the school environment.

How teachers perceive students' spoken and written language from their perspective is also a critical area for research especially because cultural differences remain hidden for their participants and is especially important when there is a gap caused by cultural and racial differences. For example, Sarah Michaels research (1986, 1991) examined oral presentations of black and white students during "sharing time" and revealed that teachers were engaged in implicitly imposing a form of "expository" discourse on the black students oral form. Students from cultures with an oral tradition are placed at a disadvantage. Typically, teachers hear language from their role as middle class language users and do not recognize how they impose meaning on the students' narrative when in fact that student has created meaning in a different structure. Michael's research showed that teachers were able to "scaffold" an explicit form for students, mostly white, who had a topic-centered approach while black students who employed a "topic-associating" narrative style were less able to develop this schemata. Teachers interrupted black students' presentations at the wrong moments and failed to see when and how meaning was constructed. For example, teachers failed to pick up on black children's use of prosody to make topical shifts (Michael, 1986, p. 109). As is so often the case the literate activities and linguistic styles of the black students were not built upon as bridges to other linguistic events and as the basis for the development of knowledge and learning (Collins & Michaels, 1986). In another article Michaels (1991) mentions that the assumption that guides teachers in imposing such discourse schemata on students narratives is their belief that students "first need to gain control over simple, " 'topic centered' forms of discourse as a transition to literacy" before the production of more rhetorically difficult texts (p.118).

CONCLUSION

This review of the literature in literacy studies is an attempt to redefine the concept of literacy from a broader social, cultural and political context. The research points in new directions for including "multiliteracies" or "plurality of literacies" in educational settings and literacy programs. However, identifying the criteria for these literacies remains a problem; yet their implications for teaching reading, writing as well as academic discourses or literacies are extremely valuable. Multiliteracies must be studied in many contexts to better understand their role in instruction and curriculum development. For example, there is a pressing need to define and recognize "non-schooled" literacies associated with different mediums and tools, including the technological, visual, and mathematical, and the literacies associated with using information technology such as the Internet and the worldwide web. In addition, there remains much to learn from studying cross-cultural concepts of literacy, especially in understanding literary forms and genres. Understanding the relationship between genre and literacy is extremely important for instructional purposes. For those teaching in adult literacy programs, the research in literacy studies will continue to offer new insights and ideas for formulating new research questions and problems and extending our knowledge about this extremely complex human activity.

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